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Marian Co-redemption: A Balthasarian Perspective

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For an overview of what the Swiss dogmatician Hans Urs von Balthasar has to say on this theme, which in the pontificate of John Paul II re-surfaced in liturgical, theological and popular consciousness,[1] I propose to divide up my material into a trio of segments. I shall give them titles that aim to illuminate Balthasar's thought. Thus I shall be looking at: firstly, 'the pre-redemption'; secondly, 'the co-redemption strictly so called'; and then thirdly, 'the trans-redemption'. I preface my account of Balthasar's thinking on these three topics with a few general remarks about his Mariology, and close with some final reflections.

Balthasar's Mariology in general

What is the formal character – the methodology, so to speak – of Balthasar's Mariology? Rather than laying down a law that reflection on our blessed Lady must have this or that departure point (commonly, in modern Catholic practice, this will be either Christology or ecclesiology), Balthasar prefers to draw attention to the fact that Marian theology cannot dispense with a *dramatic story* of the Virgin and Mother. It is, he points out, a requirement of (any) woman's ontology, her very being, that she requires a span of time – a narrative space – in which to develop from 'receptive bride' to the mother who both bears and nurtures a child. This will not fail to be so in this special case where 'creation reaches its epitome in Mary's

[1] I have in mind the liturgical impetus given by the promulgation of the 1986 *Collectio Missarum de beata Virgine Maria*, the renewed vigour of theological theories of Marian mediation dependent on an 'ecclesio-typical' Mariology (see for instance L. Eggemann, *Die 'ekklesiologische Wende' in der Mariologie des II. Vatikanums und 'Konziliare Perspektiven' als neue Horizonte für das Verständnis der Mittlerschaft Marias* [Altenberge, 1993]), and the popular movement associated with the name of the American lay theologian Mark Miravalle which lobbies for a new dogma linking co-redemption via Marian 'advocacy' to the Virgin's mediation of graces.

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bridal motherhood'.[2] Somewhat startlingly, Balthasar declares that narrative – in the sense of giving attention to the sequence of individual historical events – is more important in Mary's case than in that of Jesus. The Saviour's consciousness of his mission developed in a 'straight line' – the way his human mind drew on his divine mind for the purposes of his mission was rectilinear – whereas Mary's role was ever changing in accordance with the needs of her Son whose helpmate she is.[3] From the mysteries of the Infancy, through the public ministry to Calvary and the Cenacle, her journey follows a zigzag path. Hence the emergence of the apocryphal lives of Mary of the patristic period or the mediaeval *Vitae*, and their more chastened modern equivalents.[4] The need to construct a coherent story line cannot be avoided even in Mariological studies which examine the materials systematically, in the light of some major principle in theological doctrine, or, again, do so historically, via the chief epochs of the Church's Marian ponderings. And this will be a dramatic story, not only because of the tergiversations just mentioned but also, and supremely, because its context is the 'theo-drama': the combined divine and human acting whereby, in Balthasar's thought, saving good (the acme of all goodness) is brought within the reach of man.[5] So far-ranging are the implications of Mary's role as 'dramatic person' that, for one student of Balthasar's Mariology, it generates nothing less than an all-pervasive 'Marian principle' in his thinking.[6] Were we to suppose, however, that the formal principle could, by abstraction, be separated off from Mary herself in all the concreteness of her figure we should quite falsify the tenor of his texts.

Balthasar insists – rather puzzlingly at first sight – that while the *veneration* of Mary in the Church grew exponentially, Marian *doctrine* has always remained the same. He is quoting with approval Blessed John Henry Newman, who wrote:

[2] H. U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics, I. Seeing the Form* (Et Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1985), p. 109.

[3] H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory,* III. *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ* (Et San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), p. 294–5.

[4] By the latter, Balthasar had in mind here such works as P. Gächter, *Maria im Erdenleben. Neutestamentliche Marienstudien* (Innsbrück: Tyrolia, 1954); F. M. Willam, *Maria, Mutter und Gefährtin des Erlösers* (Freiburg: Herder, 1959).

[5] I offer a hopefully accessible entry to Balthasar's theo-dramatic theory in A. Nichols, O. P., *A Key to Balthasar. Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2011), pp. 49–88, and a full commentary on the volumes of his *Theo-dramatik* in idem., *No Bloodless Myth. A Guide through Balthasar's Dramatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2000).

[6] Hilda Steinhauer, who has written the fullest account of Balthasar's Mariological reflections overall: *Maria als dramatischer Person bei Hans Urs von Balthasar. Zum marianischen Prinzip seines Denkens* (Innsbrück: Tyrolia, 2001).

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> I fully grant that *devotion* towards the blessed Virgin has increased among Catholics with the progress of centuries; I do not allow that the *doctrine* concerning her has undergone a growth, for I believe that it has been in substance one and the same from the beginning.[7]

And like Newman, engaged in courteous polemic with Pusey, he finds already in the pre-Nicene age not only an awareness that Mary guarantees the true humanity of the Word but also a mysterious identification of Mary and Church: the two great themes, these, of all Catholic Mariology.[8]

It soon turns out, however, that what Balthasar *means* by the continuous identity of Marian doctrine is the undisturbed abiding, in the heart of the Church, of the core-affirmations of that doctrine. He would not deny – indeed, he asserts – that certain further implications required time for their unfolding. Thus, the need to reconcile the absolute primacy of the divine saving initiative with the recognition of the creature's deepest being as responsiveness to the Word, produced a long-lasting debate in Catholic theology between 'Maculists' and 'Immaculists', closing only in 1854 with Pius IX's *ex cathedra* pronouncernent on the Conception of the Mother of God.

And again, the difficulty of inter-relating appropriately the operation of the Redeemer and the co-operation of the Woman whose consent to the Word must be consent to all its resonances, all the consequences of the Incarnation, generated that disputable (but not disreputable!) family of concepts which deal with Mary's assistance to Christ's mediation. Recalling how a sea of titles for the Mother at the Cross rises (with, say, Co-redemptrix) and falls (with, perhaps, Auxiliatrix), Balthasar speaks in this same marine metaphor of

> the ebb and flow, through history, of Mariology's tides; a flood of lofty attributes, titles and venerations is almost necessarily followed by an ebb that restores the level; but the ebb-tide can also seep away, leading to a forgetfulness that is unworthy of theology.[9]

Balthasar evidently believed himself to have lived in an era when Mariology was at low tide. He wrote, with, evidently, some bitterness of feeling, *Man schämt sich einer Christenheit, die sich heute ihrer*

[7] J. H. Newman, *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, II (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), p. 26, cited in H. U. von Balthasar,. *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory,* III, op cit., p. 296.

[8] J. H. Newman, *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, II, op. cit., p. 58, on the vision of the 'Woman clothed with the Sun' in Apocalypse 12: 'doubtless the Woman represents the Church; this, I grant, is the real or direct sense, but what is the sense of the symbol under which that real sense is conveyed? *Who* are the Woman and the Child: I answer, they are not personifications but Persons. This is true of the Child, therefore it is true of the Woman.'

[9] *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory,* III, op. cit., p. 297. I draw here on material used earlier in A. Nichols, O. P., *No Bloodless Myth*, op. cit., 2000), pp. 112–113.

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Mutter schämt: 'One is ashamed for a Christianity which today is ashamed of its own Mother'.[10] This statement, made by Balthasar a few years into the post-Conciliar crisis (it appeared in an essay in the magazine of his old alma mater, the Benedictine school at Engelberg, which lies between Lucerne and Interlaken) announces a theme which will be heard increasingly in his later theology. It is the theme of Mary, the Mother of God.

Let us now, then, move away from the question of how, in formal terms, Balthasar viewed Mariology – a dramatic story prompting fresh doctrinal articulation on the basis of abiding core-affirmations – and move on instead to the substance, the theological meat, of his teaching.

While by no means entirely absent from his earlier writing, Marian themes came to exercise him more and more as a result of the demands on him of his *dirigée* the mystic Adrienne von Speyr who needed his theological help in order to express her own intuitive inspirations in the fuller form which a priest with a profoundly rooted and wide-ranging ecclesial culture could provide. It will probably never be possible to ascertain with certainty what he gave Adrienne von Speyr and what she gave him. But we can at least say that a surprising number of the leit-motifs of his mature Mariology are already audible by way of overture in her 1948 study *Magd des Herren,* 'The Handmaid of the Lord'.[11] The notion that opens *Magd des Herren,* 'consent', *Zustimmung*, will prove to be the key concept in Balthasar's own Marian thinking, and his Mariology reflects her conviction that reflection on the story of our Lady should commence, continue and end here. She writes:

> This single, all-encompassing act accompanies her at every moment of her existence, illuminates every turning point of her life, bestows upon every situation its own particular meaning and in all situations gives Mary herself the grace of renewed understanding.[12]

It can hardly be coincidence that, in Balthasar's presentation of the story of the *Theotokos*, what is emphasised is Mary's undivided – single-minded and single-hearted – assent to the unique mission of her Son.[13] At the Annunciation she gave her consent to the Incarnation of the Logos in her womb; on Calvary she assented to the Sacrifice her Son offered for the sins of the world; and with Christ's rising in glory this *fiat* or act of saying Yes is transformed into unending

[10] H. U. von Balthasar, 'Marienverehrung heute', *Titlisgrüsse* 55. 1 (1968), pp. 2–6.

[11] A. von Speyr, *Handmaid of the Lord* (Et London: Harvill Press, 1956).

[12] Ibid., p. 7.

[13] Balthasar's commitment to this work was long lasting as is demonstrated by the second edition which appeared from his publishing house, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln, in 1969.

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jubilation.[14] In Balthasarian Mariology, the theme of consent is like the thread of Ariadne which enabled the Attic hero Theseus to find his way out of the Labyrinth – in our case out of the tortuous ways of speculation onto the broad sunlit uplands not of Crete, as in the Greek legend, but of divine truth.

The 'pre-redemption'

What, then, does Balthasar have to say about what I propose to call the 'pre-redemption', the pre-Calvary contribution of Mary to her Son's saving work? In a study of the historic development of Marian titles, René Laurentin showed that the term 'co-redemptrix' came to displace an older word of prayer and praise – 'redemptrix' – which, along with other soteriologically maximalist titles such as 'life', 'salvation', 'hope' had functioned hitherto as a way of speaking about Mary's role in the Incarnation.[15] Had that word survived into the early modern period, it would of course have been especially shocking (indeed, deliciously so) to Protestants.

But once theological attention passed from Mary's part in the Flesh-taking of the Word to her place on Calvary, and so her part in the Word Incarnate's Sacrifice, it was felt inappropriate – confusing and incongruous – to call Mary 'redeemer' in this new setting. In due course, then, the language of '*co*-redemption' took the now vacated place. Yet despite this linguistic history (and I am assuming that Laurentin's researches are fundamentally sound), much early modern and modern discussion of Mary's co-redemption continued to focus, in fact, on her cooperation in the Incarnation, for, after all, the latter establishes *the pre-conditions for her collaboration at the Cross*. This is where use of the phrase 'the pre-redemption' comes into its own.

True, along with many of the Church Fathers, one might regard the Incarnation as not only the putting in place of the ultimate condition of the Redemption – the moment when the Mediator, the One capable of joining the sundered 'terms' of God on the one hand, and sinful humanity on the other, is constituted in his own being – but also as the actual beginning of the Redemption properly so called.[16] On such a view, the Incarnation is itself redemptive, and all that the victorious Cross does is to sweep away the obstacle of sin which prevents the deployment of the Incarnation's energies. It is not possible to

[14] J. Saward, *The Mysteries of March. Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (London: Collins, 1990), pp. 61–81.

[15] R. Laurentin, *Le titre de Co-rédemptrice. Etude historique* (Rome: Editions Marianum; Paris: Nouvelles Editions latines, 1951).

[16] J.-P. Jossua, O. P., *Le salut, Incarnation ou mystère pascal? Chez les Pères de L'Eglise de saint Irénée à saint Léon le Grand* (Paris: Cerf, 1968).

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grasp Balthasar's theology, however, unless one regards the coming to be of the redemptive Mediator as simply the *virtual* inauguration of salvation which itself comes about in its *definitive* reality and *full* efficacy only with the Paschal Mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection. And this, I take it, is the better view – if perhaps a rather 'Greek' one for the Byzantine Liturgy, unlike the Latin (or the Syrian or the Armenian come to that), gives more weight to the Easter cycle than it does to that of the Nativity.[17]

For Balthasar, our Lady's pre-redemptive role should be sought not only in her contribution to the Lord's infancy (though pre-eminently there) but also, and in continuity with this, via her place in the public ministry of Jesus. As I have stressed, his account of these things – like his comments on what I term the 'co-redemption strictly so called' and the 'trans-redemption' (my phrase for the reception of redemption through Mary) – turns at all points on the concept of consent. How, then, does he see our Lady's pre-redemptive role?

There are, to his mind, three considerations which point up the importance of Mary's free consent to the Incarnation. First, in taking flesh in a human mother's womb God must not violate his creature, for this would transgress the most basic Creator-creature relationship. So in the Annunciation he turns to Mary, appealing to her will, waiting (though not for long!) for her reply. Secondly, this particular Mother had to be capable of introducing her Child as man into the fullness of Israel's religion, which was the already existing divine revelation to mankind and so would form the indispensable presupposition and background for Jesus's mission. Thirdly, the Incarnation of the Word requires what Balthasar calls 'a flesh that welcomes him perfectly'.[18] In other words, the matrix into which the Logos entered when he stepped into the created, material realm had to be perfectly disposed to union with himself. Mary's consent, which establishes the co-redemption in the broader sense of that word by inaugurating what I am calling its 'pre-redemptive' phase, is itself conditioned (like the subsequent co-redemptive act at the Cross whence what I am terming the 'trans-redemption' issues) by the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. For it is the peculiar grace of the latter that it makes Mary utterly open both to God and to men. In *Theo-Drama* Balthasar writes:

[17] G. Rémy, 'Le Christ Médiateur dans l'oeuvre de S. Thomas d'Aquin', *Revue Thomiste* XCIII. ii (1993), pp. 183–233, and here at p. 230. A 'Greek view': see R. Taft, S. J., 'L'apport des liturgies d'Orient à l'intelligence du culte chrétien', in p. de Clerck (ed.), *La Liturgie, lieu théologique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1999), pp. 97–122, and here at pp. 108–109.

[18] H. U. von Balthasar [with Adrienne von Speyr], *Au coeur du Mystère rédempteur* (Paris: Editions C. D. F., 1980), p. 55.

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> As a Mother, she has to mediate – in the requisite purity – everything human that her Child needs; as her Son's companion and bride, she must be able to share his sufferings in a way appropriate to her, and what most fits her for this task is her utter purity, which means that she is profoundly exposed and vulnerable.[19]

As this passage suggests, Mary's consent is not only virginal and maternal. It is also, and Balthasar will emphasise this, 'bridal'. When we speak of her *virginal* consent we should be minded to think of her relation with Israel (she is the perfect 'virgin daughter of Zion'). When we speak of her *maternal* consent we should be minded to think of her relation with Christ (for reasons that hardly need explaining). When we speak of her *bridal* consent, we should be minded to think of her relation with the whole of humanity, and indeed the cosmos.

How so? The hypostatic union is a marriage between divine nature and human, for which Mary is not simply a *venue*. The marriage of divinity and humanity in the single person of the Word incarnate does not take its matrimonial character exclusively from the side of God, for Mary had to give a bridal consent on the behalf of all creation. To Balthasar's mind, it is because Mary is a woman that she can represent the human creation vis-à-vis God. A male human being would have been unable to fulfil this role. The reason is: creaturehood has an archetypally feminine quality. Because the creature is not made in the image of the Father but in the image of the Word, humanity is more primordially receptive than it is creative – just as in the eternal Trinity the Son is primarily receptivity, sheer reception of the Father's life, and only on that basis can he be creative, whether metaphorically so when with the Father he spirates the Spirit or literally so when the world is made through him. So humankind is likewise *creative on the basis of being receptive*, and of its two genders, male and female, it is the *female* which the better represents the substance of human creaturehood in this respect.

Though physiologically speaking, the active female contribution to generation is as important as that of the male, nevertheless at the level of the human totalities involved it is the woman who receives and the man who gives. Nothing 'gender studies' has to say can suppress that fact. But neither should this be taken, in the theological inference Balthasar draws from it, as a ground for belittling creation in its womanly aspect. If, in the Incarnation, the part of man is taken by God as giver, this does not render the human recipient of the divine gift passive. As Balthasar puts it, commenting on Mary's *fiat*:

[19] Idem., *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory,* III., op. cit., p. 323.

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> Let us say rather that this assent is the highest and most fruitful of human activities, or in terms St Paul might have used, faith is required more fundamentally than works.[20]

When he turns from the Annunciation, the beginning of the pre-redemptive phase of the co-redemption, to the remainder of that phase, namely, to Mary's place in the public life of the Saviour prior to his Passion, Balthasar stresses the infinite flexibility her continuing consent to the Incarnation and its redemptive unfolding entails. She does not insist on understanding in advance everything there is to know about her mysterious Son. In the popular format of an essay in the collection *Maria heute* Balthasar comments accordingly:

> Just as Jesus little anticipated the fate that lay in store for him but let it be revealed to him from day to day by his Father, so too would his mother have anticipated little of what was to come: part of her faith (the fulfilment of the faith of Abraham) was always to accept God's dispositions.[21]

Mary is called to enter after Jesus the night of the senses – the rupture of physical contact with her Son, and also the night of the spirit – the breakdown of understanding of him. Here we see Balthasar's indebtedness to the Carmelite school. These phrases ('night of the senses', 'night of the spirit') are taken from the ascetical and mystical theology of St John of the Cross.

The most original aspect of Balthasar's theology of Marian consent during the public ministry is his interpretation, precisely by means of these Sanjuanist phrases, of the 'distancings' between Jesus and Mary. This rubric covers such moments as the losing of the Child in the Jerusalem temple; the rebuke at the marriage-feast of Cana, and the declaration that the true mother is whoever does the will of the heavenly Father. Traditional Protestant exegesis has viewed these episodes or sayings with some satisfaction, as indicative of a low Mariology on the evangelists' part. Catholic exegesis has sought, not always persuasively, to vindicate them from that charge.

Like typically Protestant exegesis, Balthasar interprets these moments as definite turnings away of the Son from the mother. But, unlike such exegesis, he regards these self-removals of Jesus from Mary as invitations by the Son to the Mother whereby he calls her to enter with him into the experience of abandonment which will come to its climax at the Cross. There, at least in Balthasar's theology of Calvary, the abandonment of Christ revealed in paradoxical fashion the perfect loving union of Abandoner and Abandoned. They are the

[20] Idem., *Au coeur du Mystère rédempteur*, op. cit., p. 58.
[21] Idem., *Mary for Today* (Et Middlegreen: St Paul's Publications, 1987), p. 16.

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consubstantial Father and Son who, through the *homoousion* of the Spirit, are ever one in the Holy Trinity.

Here too, in the Marian dimension of his other-relatedness, Jesus is engaged by seemingly negative actions in the most superlatively positive activity. He is transforming his mother's faith from simply being the faith of Israel, albeit the faith of Israel in uniquely fulfilled form, into being a 'cruciform faith', a faith of the kind that will typify the Church. Precisely by turning away from her he teaches her the demands of his mission and what is going to be her share in the mission of that Church she will personally embody.

He shows her the way her *fiat* will have to persevere through darkness and incomprehension. And this lays the foundation for the Mother's future collaboration with the Son, her role in 'the co-redemption strictly so called', just as that co-redemptive role further establishes, through her, the basis for the Church's co-operation in redemption: what I am calling in its Marian foundation the 'trans-redemption'.

The co-redemption strictly so called

At the Cross the movement of Mary's continuing consent reaches its climax in her receptive yet supremely creative standing by. In his theological dramatics Balthasar writes:

> It is only in this way that the New Eve is the helper of the New Adam. . . . He makes room for his Mother's part, so different and so painful, which is simply to let his suffering happen and to accept all the pain that must happen to her too.[22]

Now the notion that, at the Cross, what Mary was doing was a unique form of consenting is by no means special to Balthasar. It is found, indeed, in no less exalted a source than the concluding Marian chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church. There we read of the *consensus*, 'consent', *quem in Annuntiatione fideliter praebuit, quemque sub Cruce incunctanter sustinuit*, 'which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and sustained unwaveringly beneath the Cross'.[23] And again, on the moment of the Atonement, from the same chapter, but this time more fully, we hear:

> Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, suffering grievously with her

[22] H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory,* IV. *The Action* (Et San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), p. 395.

[23] *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

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> only-begotten Son. There she united herself with a maternal heart to his sacrifice, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth.[24]

The question is, then, not *whether* she consented, but *what sort of consent was this* and *how may its implications be gauged*.

I now lay out the elements of Balthasar's answer to this question (or questions).

1. Though there is no need to present Mary as consenting to the Atonement on humanity's behalf – for that is done by Jesus himself, nevertheless, to the extent that Mary's consent at the Annunciation was a pre-condition of the Incarnation it cannot at the Cross simply be engulfed by the human 'Yes' of her Son. A distinctive value is retained for her act of consent in what is done at the Tree. It is not incorporated without remainder in the New Adam's self-offering to the Father.
2. In thus renewing her *fiat*, Mary does so from a position not only of proximity to the Crucified but also of distance from him. At the Cross, Mary is both close and distant. This is fitting, for, so Balthasar explains, despite her unique proximity in spirit to her Saviour-Son, she is – precisely as the Immaculate – in complete solidarity with sinners, endlessly at their disposal.[25] Only a human nature and personhood thus transformed by grace can be so utterly open to others. It is in this optic that we must contemplate her standing at the Cross's foot. The uniqueness of her witness to the Offering lies in her simultaneous identification both with the Offerer and with those for whom the Sacrifice is offered. On Calvary, the Son is thus accompanied by a uniquely well-placed consenting witness to God's atoning action. And this means – *pace* opponents of all notions of Marian co-redemption whatsoever – that the revelation of the Trinity on the Cross cannot be expounded on the basis of the Crucified alone.
3. This witness, the Mother of the Lord, is, moreover, an icon of the fruitful receptivity by which the Son, in the spiritual darkness of the Passion, lovingly obeys the Father in the Holy Spirit. It is because of her 'poverty', the 'humiliation' of which the *Magnificat* speaks – her standing behind sinners and with them – that she is able to receive the measureless outpouring of the Son on the Cross in his Sacrifice of praise and petition to the Father, and receive it in such a way that she becomes the Bride of the Lamb

[24] Ibid., 58, with allusions to John 19: 25 and 26–27.

[25] H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory, IV. The Action*, op. cit., p. 356.

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> and the Womb of the Church – a 'nuptial relationship that begins in the utter forsakenness and darkness they both experience'.[26]

Here we move from the realm of the 'objective redemption' – how the all-sufficient redemptive act was put in place – to that of 'subjective redemption', which concerns the manner in which the effects of the redeeming act are transmitted to beneficiaries.

Mary consents to be the witness par excellence of the atoning Act, and in the way in which she does so she becomes the fruitful recipient of all its effects. '*The way in which she does so':* this, for Balthasar, is crucial. We can trumpet Mary's share in the victorious Passion of Christ only if we keep in mind that she lived out that sharing in the spirit of the Beatitudes. The triumphant vindication whereof she spoke in her *Magnificat* continued to be conditioned by the utter 'lowliness' she ascribed to herself in that canticle (Luke 1: 48). Balthasar adds provocatively that at the Cross her 'Yes' was to her own helplessness. Consigned to the care of John, she found herself dispatched to apparent uselessness in the work of salvation. The qualifier 'apparent' here brings me to the last stage in my exposition of Balthasar's thinking, to what I call the 'trans-redemption'.

The trans-redemption

The apparent uselessness, the seeming sterility, of Mary's state of being at the Cross in fact concealed its opposite. In actuality, she was in process of becoming the 'womb' in which the dying incarnate Word was placing the 'seed' of the Church. All the spiritual fruitfulness that will characterise the community of the Messiah, the total transformative power vouchsafed the Church for the purposes of human redemption, began at that moment in and through Mary's witnessing consent to the saving Sacrifice and it did so thanks to the uniquely receptive quality of her response. In Balthasar's words, the Word 'finally and definitively becomes flesh in the Virgin-Mother, Mary-Ecclesia'.[27] This will give him the starting-point for his theology of the *Church* of the Word incarnate:

> Because Mary is bodily the Mother of the Lord, the Bride-Church must be bodily and visible, and her visible sacraments and institutions must be an occasion for the spiritual experience of Christ and of God.[28]

[26] Ibid., p. 358.
[27] Ibid., p. 361.
[28] Idem., *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics, I. Seeing the Form*, op. cit., p. 364. See more widely on this theme, B. Leahy, *The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996).

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On his view, it is vital that in our Lady the Church herself consented to the Redemption, and continues to consent in, with, and through, Mary's never retracted 'Yes' to the death of her Son, such that redemption not only once upon a time but ever afterwards passes through or across ('*trans*') Mary. As Balthasar sees things, the God-man did not want the Church to participate in his atoning Sacrifice simply after the event, when it was all over. He wanted the Church to be contemporary with the event, so that from the very beginning the Sacrifice of Calvary was inseparably that of Head and members. Even in the utter dereliction of Calvary he did not wish to act without the accompaniment of the Church. And this Mary provided.[29]

Through the supreme renewal of her virginal, maternal and bridal consent, as offered in the poverty and darkness of the place by the Cross, Mary was enabled by the Holy Trinity to give birth to the Church – and to go on doing so continually throughout the ages. She allowed herself to lose everything personally her own – including her Son – so that all that is hers may be 'expropriated', given over to the members of the Church.[30] As Balthasar puts it in his exegesis of the mysteries of the Rosary:

> Mary-the-Church keeps no grace for herself; she receives grace in order to transmit it. This is what a mother does. We are the children of Mary's fruitfulness, and her fruitfulness has been given her that she might receive and fulfil the fruitfulness of her Spouse.[31]

Some concluding remarks

It should be obvious by now that Balthasar's teaching was hardly couched in the rigorous Neo-Scholastic idiom characteristic of the theology of Marian co-redemption at the high point of its productivity in the 1940s and 50s.[32] Much of the time, his is a theology which moves forward by the exploration of images, or by plotting the dramatic relations which seem to connect the various figures of the divine 'play' of salvation. While not without argumentative elements, its main service consists in setting forth certain intuitions which theologians of a more conceptual stamp may cast into more rigorous form. One might think here of the analogy of a scientific theory. For such a theory imaginative construction is the more basic

[29] Idem., *Au coeur du Mystère rédempteur*, op. cit., p. 54.

[30] Idem., *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics, I. Seeing the Form*, op. cit., p. 341.

[31] Idem., *The Threefold Garland* (Et San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988 [1982]), p. 137.

[32] A good idea of these may be had by scanning the 'Bulletins mariales' furnished by Père Jean-Hervé Nicolas, O. P., in the pages of the *Revue thomiste* in the years surrounding the dogmatisation of Mary's Assumption.

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and important step, even though a new hypothesis about the physical world cannot be taken with full seriousness until the procedures of verification proper to the scientific community have been applied.

A doctrine of co-redemption concerned to integrate Balthasar's intuitions – something which should only be ventured if they can be said *already to serve as instruments for expressing the faith-consciousness of the Church*, the Great Paradosis of revelation – would want to do justice not only to what I have been terming the co-redemption strictly so called, the events on Golgotha, but also to what I have called the pre-redemption and trans-redemption.

To include our Lady's role in the Incarnation ('pre-redemption') has the advantage of keeping within the scope of the wider concept of co-redemption that original Annunciation consent which is the focus of the most ancient theologies of this subject. To extend the purview of the doctrine to the communication of redemption through Mary as embodiment of the Church ('trans-redemption') would have the further merit of incorporating within the doctrine the idea of Marian mediation of the grace of Christ. Yet the centre of the doctrine should surely be the Happening on the Hill ('the redemption strictly so-called').

I must now make a confession, My account so far has concealed the fact that Balthasar did not actually favour the use of the word 'co-redemptrix', even though, as I have sought to show, he upheld in original (some might think idiosyncratic) form the substance of the doctrine. His anxieties about the diffusion of the term in a popular context are widely shared, not least because of the changing fortunes of that all-important prefix 'co', at least in English. Its meaning is shifting from the original sense of *accompaniment* to the very different modern connotation of *equality*. That is not to say that no acceptable periphrasis can be found. 'The Redemptive Collaboratrix' is a bit of a mouthful but hardly more so than the name a lady in a grotto once confided to Bernadette Soubirous: 'The Immaculate Conception'.

Personally, for what it is worth, I have come to look more favourably on the proposal of a dogmatic definition. The principal doctrinal – as distinct from pastoral – virtue of such a definition would lie in its enabling the Marian proclamation of the Church to address not only the beginning of definitive salvation (as is done in the dogmas of the Conception, Motherhood and Virginity), and not only definitive salvation's outcome (as is done in the dogma of the Assumption), but the key moment of definitive salvation itself, the Paschal Mystery.

The Orthodox urge that there should be no proclamation about Mary, since her place is in the secret heart of the mystery of the Church, not in the Gospel *kerygma* heralded to the world. This point of view would have bewildered the Fathers of Ephesus. They thought

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it best to speak about who God is in Jesus Christ by way of discourse about Mary whom they proclaimed to be the Bearer-of-God. This Ephesian strategy can be extended. If our intellectual eye is too weak to take in the overall dimensions of the salvation wrought on the Cross and its triumphant display in the remaining acts of the Paschal Mystery – and surely it is too weak, since these are the events whereby the Incarnate One re-made the world – we can at least speak of how they registered in the human response of Mary, and speak too of their fruitful consequences in the Woman whom the Man who sits at the Father's right has crowned. In some not only beautiful but penetrating words, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna wrote:

> Why is it that theology finds the centre of its heart in the heart of a woman who is Jesus' mother? Mary is the guarantor of Christian realism; in her it becomes manifest that God's word was not only spoken but heard; that God has not only called but man has answered; that salvation was not only presented but also received. Christ's is God's word, Mary is the answer; in Christ, God has come down from heaven, in Mary the earth has become fruitful. Mary is the seal of perfect creatureliness; in her is illustrated in advance what God intended for creation.[33].

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[33] Words spoken at the 1986 Fatima Symposium on the Alliance of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, cited in M. I. Miravalle (ed.), *Contemporary Insights on a Fifth Marian Dogma. Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate. Theological Foundations III* (Goleta, CA, Queenship Publishing, 2000), p. 6.

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